

BULLETIN 44—1930

Adequacy
of the
County Prisons 1929

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF WELFARE
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ADEQUACY OF THE COUNTY PRISONS

1929

The welfare of Pennsylvania and of the prison held wards of the Commonwealth is primarily dependent upon the personnel of the officials in immediate contact with prisoners, and upon their immediate superiors. This fact is obviously true in the smaller prisons where small groups of inmates do not make it necessary to contend with the problems incident to large populations.

The best administrator is handicapped by inadequate machinery through which to perform his duties. Chief of the mechanical elements in the control of the prison population is the building plant and its accessories.

Building adequacy is a material issue, tangible to the senses, which is an undisputed factor of the prison control problem. There are a certain number of prisoners and a certain space in which to place these prisoners. This study is planned to present one phase of the prison building adequacy as it existed in Pennsylvania in 1929.

In determining the measuring instruments, this Department accepted one cell as the proper space for the detention of one person. There are some institutions in the Commonwealth which place two or more persons in a cell. This practice has developed from necessity, expediency, or perhaps, other reasons. If ten cells are available and twenty persons are held, the easy practice is to place two persons in one cell. It is seemingly a cheap process of building to provide double bunks in a cell, to provide dormitories instead of cells, even to providing double beds in dormitories or cells, and to have two persons occupy these beds.

Especially in penal institutions of original detention, as the county jail is, where unconvicted persons are held for trial, where first offenders make up a very large portion of the group, and where long term offenders and habitual criminals as well are incarcerated—here, especially, it is important that all reasonable precautions should be taken to protect each person incarcerated from social injuries which are not uncommonly received when social contacts are made in jails. This point is especially true when the lack of occupation and lack of opportunities for profitable recreation make close confinement with a cell mate a compulsion to form social bonds with that cell mate.

It has been proposed that social life should be developed in prison. With this point the Department is in accord. The Department holds, however, that sleeping quarters are not the places for social life to be developed.

A single cell for an individual affords protection to the individuals:

1. Physical health: by diminishing opportunities for contact with vermin and contagious disease

2. Mental security: by preventing contact with possible malcontents, and possible lewd and vicious minds
3. Social health: by making impractical homosexual activities which are not uncommon among prisoners, especially the younger ones; by improving the possibilities of retaining the self respect frequently impaired by associations with others when privacy is not possible.

Since separate confinement for the inactive hours of the night makes less probable the formations of "pals" and "gangs," and for other reasons, the department holds that the only proper minimum unit of measurement for county prison capacity is one cell for each inmate.

4. The Act of April 8, 1851, makes the single cell per inmate mandatory. Repealed but restated by Act 447, 1929, sec. 567.

For this study, therefore, the numbers of cells in each county prison in the Commonwealth was determined. The maximum population in this study is the number of persons who will occupy all cells when one person is placed in one cell. The maximum population is therefore represented by the same number which indicates the total number of cells.

In the series of charts following, the horizontal 100% line represents the maximum capacity. Bar graphs above the line indicate a condition of overpopulation; those under the 100% line indicate underpopulation. This line is represented by the symbol "O".

The number of inmates in prison, as used in this study, is the number in prison on the last day of each month of 1929, as reported to this Department by the officials in charge of the institutions on a special questionnaire form. A few prisons did not have this data for 1929. The number used to represent their status was the number in prison the last day of the year, and this number was taken from reports by the officials in charge of the institution. No maximum and minimum populations show for these few institutions.

The first series shows its male population with counties grouped by class of county on the basis of comparable county population as shown by the 1920 census. The second series shows this data grouped by work house districts as defined by the Act of 1929 in order to show geographical relationship. The summarizing map indicates generalizations from these figures.

Since the bar graphs represent *percentages*, it is evident that small prisons may be represented by a very long line. This matter will give no difficulty with this explanation made.

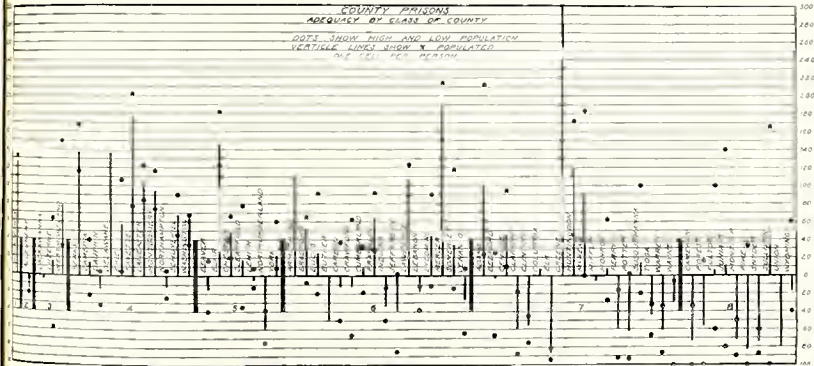
The map gives a schematic picture of the condition of prison cell adequacy, for the population actually detained in 1929.

On the graphs which include the high and low range of prison population, and the average population, it is evident that greater strain is placed on the prisons than the separate bars indicate. This range is indicated in the chart where the prisons are grouped by the class of the counties.

A detailed study of prison needs in terms of building should be made when building is an obvious need. This statement of cell ade-

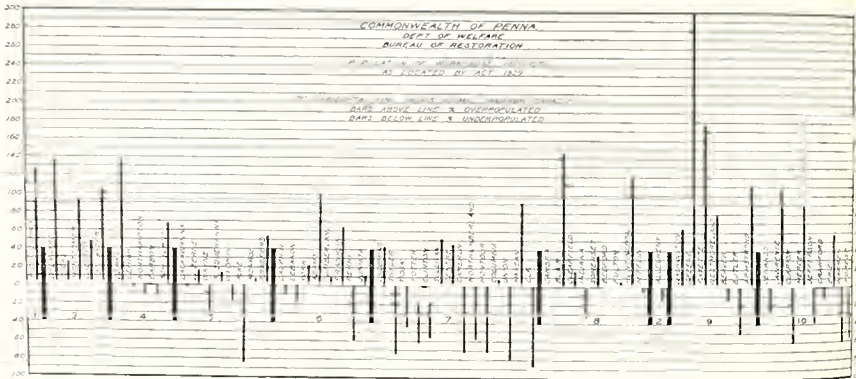
COUNTY PRISONS
ADEQUACY OF CLASS OF COUNTY

DOTS SHOW HIGH AND LOW POPULATION
VERTICLE LINES SHOW X POPULATED
ONE CELL PER PERSON



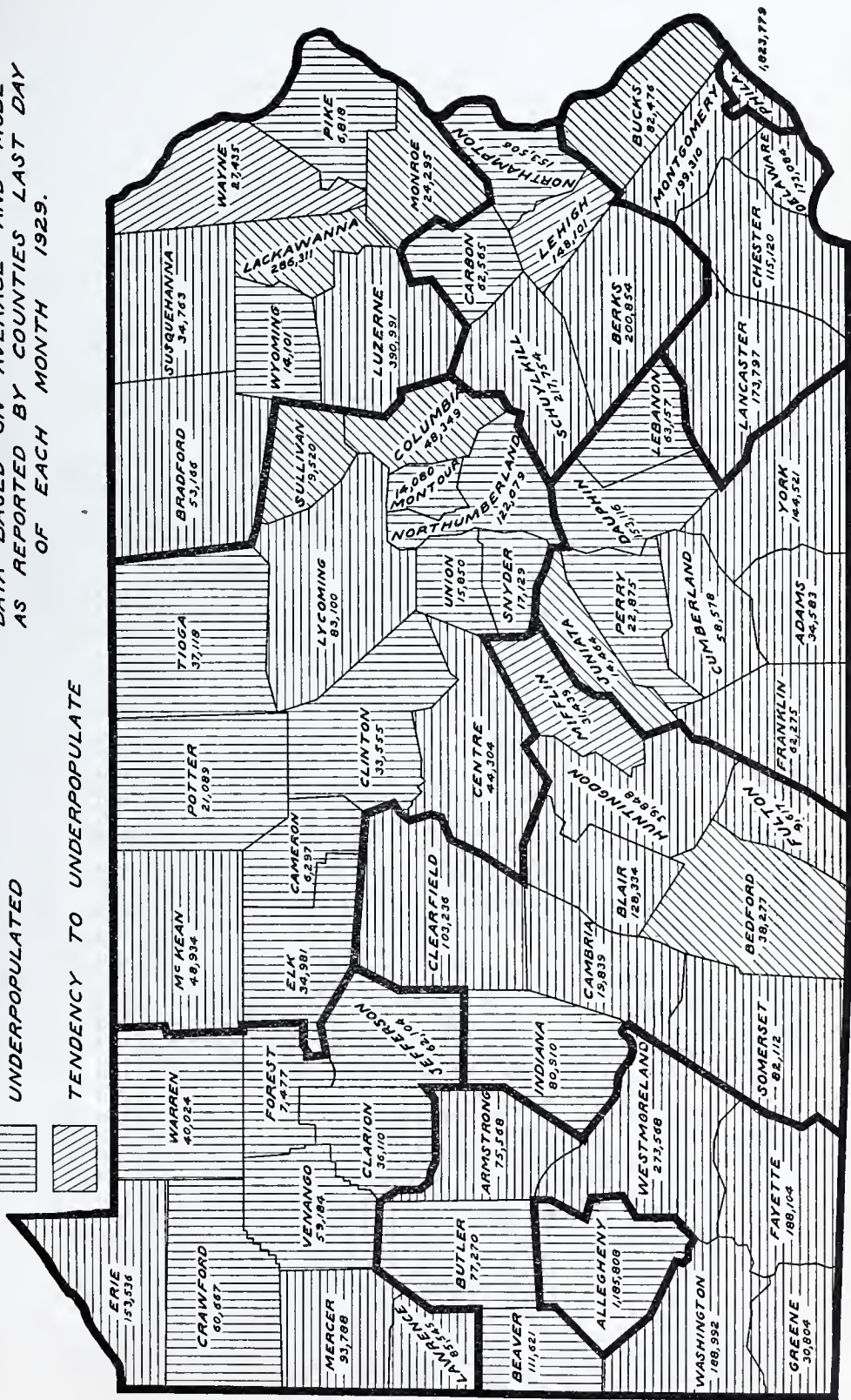
(Chart No. 1.)

The line symbol "O" indicates the capacity as represented by the total number of cells. Lines vertically above this "O" line show an average overpopulation in terms of percent. The lines indicate the maximum and minimum population in that prison. Huntington County, for example, shows an overpopulation averaging 120%. The maximum population indicates a population of 170%, and the minimum population indicates an overpopulation of 45%.



TENDENCY TO UNDERPOPULATE

DATA BASED ON AVERAGE AND MODE
AS REPORTED BY COUNTIES LAST DAY
OF EACH MONTH 1929.



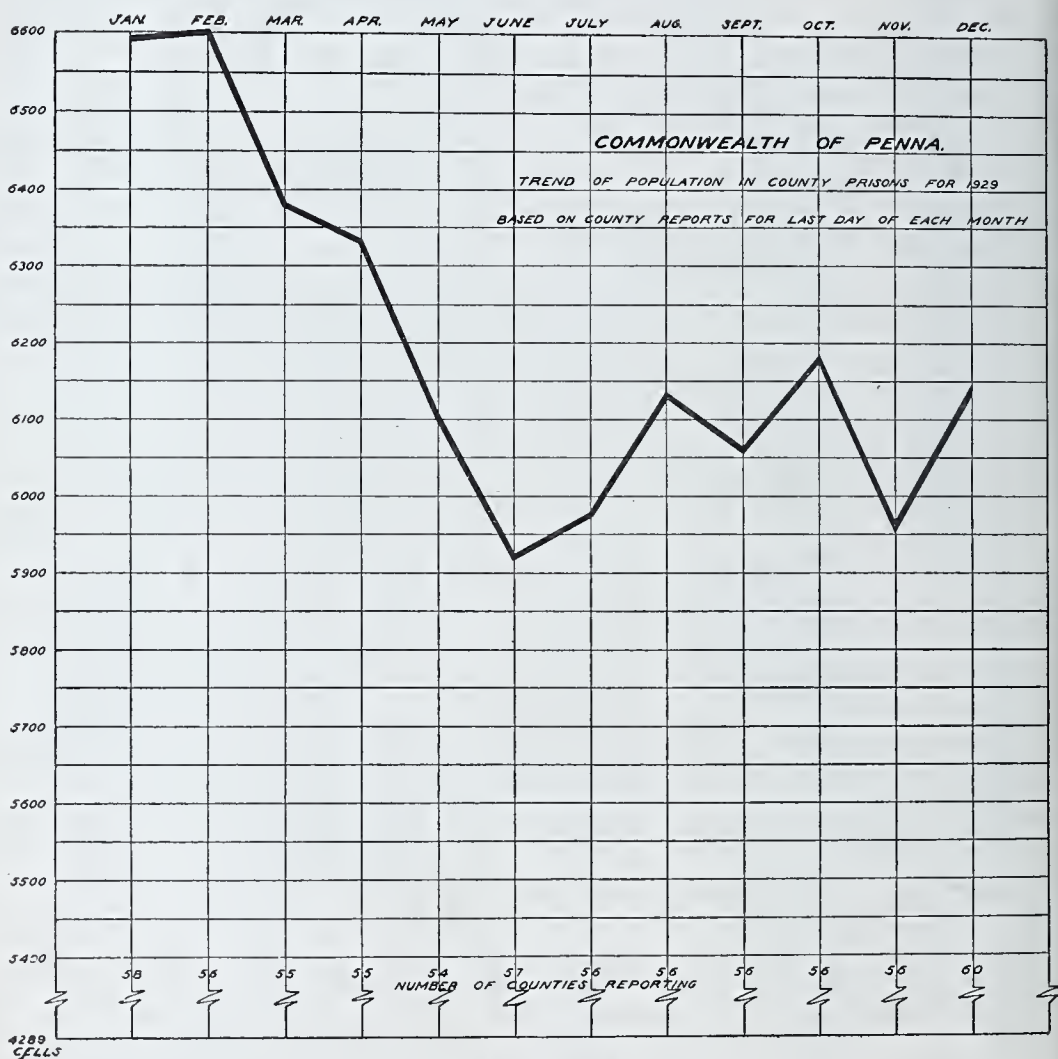


Chart No. 4

Numbers on vertical lines indicate number of counties reporting. Bottom horizontal line indicates cell capacity. Numbers at left represent population. Read,—in February there were about 6600 in prison for whom 4289 cells were available.

Note: Allegheny County Workhouse not included.
Data based on male population and cells for males.

quacy is only a single factor. It is, however, of sufficient importance to deserve serious consideration. Whether each county which shows an inadequate situation should build a new jail, or remodel the present one; or, whether underpopulated jails should be filled with transfers from overpopulated jails; or, whether groups of counties should cooperate in a building program; or, whether the relief should be through state building;—this special study does not attempt to say.

It is the hope of this Department that this treatment of a fundamental element of the county prison building situation will direct attention to those building needs which exist, in terms of cell units, and that this study will result in a careful consideration of the building needs for the State's prison population.

CORRELATIVE ISSUES

It is pertinent here to direct attention to balancing factors in a proposed building program.

Maintenance, custody, welfare, and training are indicated to be factors pertinent to the suitability of a penal institution. (Act 13, March 9, 1927, P. L. 24, Section 7 and Act 239, 1929, P. L. 542).

These factors have not all been considered in detail in this study. Obviously certain building space is needed, certain arrangements of the building and yard space are more desirable than others, certain materials are more economical than others to use in erecting prisons.

PERSONNEL

Without question the most important "feature" of a prison is the personnel in charge. Antiquated and otherwise unsatisfactory conditions incident to the mechanical features of the building may be offset by a capable administrator.

Capable administration makes the need for *high cost* building structure a less critical issue.

Where the administration effectively classifies the inmates into groups easy to control and difficult to control,—in brief, when the control problem is definitely known, it is possible to house the inmates who are difficult to control in structures which insure their detention.

With a group of inmates known to be amenable to control, it is possible to provide quarters for their detention which are much less costly than those required for the difficult group.

Where there is no accurate knowledge of the inmates, the practicability of functional classification is very doubtful.

COSTS

Based on the cost per cell, unit costs of prison buildings range from about 800 to 6000 dollars. This extremely wide variation in cost suggests a deplorable lack of standardization in terms of prison structure needs.

Much of the building of prisons seems to have been done without careful preliminary planning.

It may be possible greatly to reduce our prison building costs by careful classification of the inmates of prisons.

Institutions housing long term inmates have been built and have been operating successfully at a building cost of less than 1000 dollars per inmate. If a careful selection of prisoners would make the use of such type structures practical, it seems very desirable to entertain the idea of making a proper selection of inmates to be housed in such a low cost institution.

CLASSIFICATION

In educational work, the more nearly homogeneous a group is, the more effective can be made the instruction which is offered. In the homogeneous group the degree of learning possible to attain, the learning rates, the problems of control et al., are more nearly alike.

The degree of effectiveness of a program of maintenance, custody, welfare, and training is increased by effective classification.

With proper functional segregation, not only will the problems of institutional control probably be materially simplified, the costs of building materially reduced, but also the effectiveness of programs leading to the restoration of the prisoner will probably be enhanced.

These brief comments are included here to caution against any assumption which might be made that the prisons of the several counties might be made "adequate" by the mere addition of the number of cells necessary to house the inmates.

We present here the situation as it existed in 1929 to indicate that the problem is not an academic one,—that Pennsylvania faces a situation that requires definite study to determine just what shall be done to provide for the proper maintenance, custody, welfare, and training of the inmates of its penal institutions.